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RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 1094
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0518
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1189
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0468
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 1077
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 0077
RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN 4271
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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 PRETORIA 001557

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SF](#) [ZI](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: MDC LEADERSHIP MEETS IN SOUTH AFRICA, DECIDES TO
LAUNCH CAMPAIGN

REF: A. HARARE 344

[1](#)B. PRETORIA 1447

[1](#)C. 06 PRETORIA 5084

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Teitelbaum. Reasons 1.4(b) and
(d).

[1](#)1. (C/NF) SUMMARY. Meeting secretly in Johannesburg April 28-29, the leadership of the Zimbabwean opposition MDC party, led by Morgan Tsvangirai, decided to launch the party's presidential campaign o/a June 1, while making clear they will not participate in the elections without fundamental reform. The MDC believes the public announcement will put pressure on SADC Facilitator Mbeki to level the electoral playing field. MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett (strictly protect) told PolOff he had received a private donation of USD 1 million to support party activities from a group of donors who prefer to remain anonymous. Only Secretary-General Biti, Tsvangirai, and Bennett know about the donation. Talks on

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forming a coalition with the Mutambara-led MDC faction continue at the grassroots, although Bennett has received information that Gibson Sibanda, former MDC Vice President under Tsvangirai, is considering returning to the Tsvangirai camp. If so, Bennett believes this would ring the death knell for the Mutambara splinter group. The MDC leaders are skeptical about the Mbeki-led SADC facilitation, but believe they must "play along." Bennett is taking care of a number of MDC leaders who have fled to South Africa after being tortured in Zimbabwe. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) The senior leadership of Zimbabwean opposition party the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), including President Morgan Tsvangirai, Secretary General Tendai Biti, National Chairman Isaac Matongo, and 11 other officials, met secretly in Johannesburg April 28-29 to discuss strategy. MDC Treasurer Roy Bennett (strictly protect) told PolOff April 30 that the meetings went "very well." The group aired their differences, and came away united and determined.

MDC To Launch Presidential Campaign

13. (C) The MDC leadership decided to launch their presidential campaign soon, likely around June 1, according to Bennett. The party formed committees to develop an election manifesto and strategy. Bennett says they will make it clear that the party will participate in elections only if the GOZ levels the playing field by removing repressive legislation and other steps outlined in their electoral roadmap (septel). The MDC believes publicly launching their campaign will keep the pressure on SADC Facilitator Mbeki to create the conditions for free and fair elections. The public launch will also put the MDC back in the news. During the campaign, Tsvangirai and Biti would move out of the "chaos of Harvest House," in Bennett's words, and into a separate headquarters.

14. (S/NF) Bennett told PolOff (in the strictest confidence) that the MDC has received a private donation of approximately USD 1 million from a group of donors who prefer to remain anonymous. With this new private funding, Bennett will help ensure that Tsvangirai and Biti have the support they need, such as good personal assistants, schedulers, and press secretaries. (NOTE: Only Tsvangirai, Bennett, and Biti know

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about the private donation of USD 1 million to the party. Bennett wants to keep it that way to keep the "vultures at bay." END NOTE)

Talks on Coalition with Mutambara Faction Continue

15. (C) On the coalition talks with the Mutambara MDC faction, Tsvangirai stressed in the meeting that the grassroots

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structures must continue their discussions before the leadership makes any decisions. Reunification or coalition

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cannot be forced from the top. Bennett stressed that the anti-Mutambara feeling is very strong in the Tsvangirai camp, and the issue has to be treated delicately. Bennett told PolOff that they have information that Gibson Sibanda, former MDC Vice President under Tsvangirai, may return to the Tsvangirai camp with as many as 12 MDC MPs very soon.

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Sibanda would become MDC Vice President. If this happens, the "game is over" since Ncube and Mutambara would be isolated.

Skepticism of Mbeki, but Must "Play Along"

16. (C) The leadership agreed that the Mbeki mediation was unlikely to succeed. They believe Mbeki's goal is a government of national unity involving Welshman Ncube and other Mutambara faction allies. That said, Tsvangirai and the MDC leadership believe they have no choice but to "play along." Tsvangirai requested a meeting with Mbeki during this trip to South Africa (ref A). Mbeki told him to see his point person on Zimbabwe, Minister for Provincial and Local Government Sydney Mufamadi, who never returned Tsvangirai's call (although it was not clear whether this was a timing issue or an intentional snub).

Torture Victims Fleeing to South Africa

17. (C) Bennett said that a number of MDC leaders have fled to South Africa after being tortured in Zimbabwe, including

"Mazoda" (Chair of Mashonaland East), "Shone" (Organizing Secretary Harare), and "Mgodi" (Treasurer Harare). Bennett

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is trying to assist them with medical care and other basic needs. He said that Mazoda and Shone both received electrical shocks to their genitals, and were badly scarred physically and psychologically.

Lobbying to Continue, Success in ANCYL

18. (C) In addition to engaging Mbeki and his team on the SADC mediation, the MDC plans to expand their contacts with opposition parties in South Africa and the region. Bennett planned on bringing the National Chair, Isaac Matongo, to South Africa to meet with all the South African opposition parties, starting with the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), followed by the South African Communist Party (SACP) (which is not technically an opposition party since it belongs to the ANC alliance), the Independent Democrats (ID), and others. (Note: Embassy does not know how Matongo's death on 2 May will affect these efforts. END NOTE).

19. (C) The MDC will continue its efforts to "work the ANC from the bottom up." Bennett was pleased that the ANC Youth League (ANCYL) had issued a statement on April 23 following its National Policy Dialogue that criticized the situation in Zimbabwe ("no revolution can thrive on the degrading of the people it supposedly seeks to serve"). The statement follows months of lobbying by MDC student leaders, as well as MDC Information Secretary Nelson Chamisa's address to the national student congress (ref B). It represents a marked shift in the ANCYL position, which had previously supported Mugabe. ANC Youth League head Fikile Mbalula told his ZANU-PF counterpart as recently as October 2006 that "you must go back and tell Mugabe we love what he is doing for the people of Zimbabwe." (COMMENT: While the ANCYL has limited influence in the ruling party, its public statement is another sign that attitudes in South Africa are shifting against Mugabe and his violent rule, even among former "friends." END COMMENT.)

TEITELBAUM